

What You Should Know About Cervical Cancer

How likely am I to develop cervical cancer?

Every year 15,000 women in the United States are diagnosed with cervical cancer. The cervix is the lower part of the uterus or womb. If cervical cancer is found early enough, it can be cured. Cervical cancer can be prevented.

Can cervical cancer be fatal?

Yes. Women die every year because they do not find out they have cervical cancer until it is too late to cure it.

What are the signs of cervical cancer?

Often there are no signs that a woman can see or feel. If you have an unusual discharge from the vagina or bleeding between or after your period, tell your health care provider.

What is the best way to prevent cervical cancer?

You should have a pelvic exam and Pap test done every year or as directed by your health care provider. This could save your life.

What is a pelvic exam?

Your health care provider checks your vagina, uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes, bladder, and rectum to make sure everything is okay.

What is a Pap test?

A health care provider uses a long swab or brush to test for abnormal or cancerous cells. Pap tests can find abnormal cells long before they turn into cancer.

Where can I get a Pap test?

You can get Pap tests at family planning sites, community health centers, primary care or OB/GYN offices, or at some hospitals.

Who should get pelvic exams and Pap tests?

All women over the age of 18 should get a pelvic exam and Pap test every year or as directed by your health care provider. Women of all ages who are sexually active should get a Pap test.

Do I still need a Pap test after menopause?

Yes, unless you have had surgery to remove your uterus and cervix.

When is the best time to have a Pap test?

This test should be done between 10 and 30 days after the first day of your period. Do not use spermicidal foams, creams, jellies, or vaginal medicines for two days before the test because they can sometimes mask abnormal cells. For women who no longer get their period, any time of the month is okay for a Pap test.

What if I have an abnormal Pap test?

You may need more tests to check your cervix. To prevent cervical cancer, it is very important to have these extra tests and to follow the advice of your health care provider. Abnormal cells on the cervix can usually be treated. You must complete all of the needed treatment to prevent the cancer.

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